

\c2\murder
April 17, 1989

Murder Mystery

For thirty years I have been investigating a crime that has not yet been committed.

The crime in question--the execution of existing US and Soviet nuclear war plans--would involve mass homicide so vast that it has never been committed, could not physically have been accomplished until about thirty years ago, and could not be carried out more than once in human history, perhaps twice (the second time, after a long interval, in the southern hemisphere).

It is thus a crime of mass murder. "Crime" and "murder" because the implementation of these existing plans, using existing nuclear arsenals, would necessarily violate fundamental moral codes and specific international law, ratified in treaties, forbidding homicide, even in wartime, so indiscriminate, grotesquely disproportionate to legitimate ends, disregarding of the rights and survival of neutrals and non-combatants, and permanently destructive of the environment.

Or perhaps these legalistic categories--conceived prior to the nuclear era, though still relevant and binding--seem inadequate, unnecessary and euphemistic in this context. There may be no need to justify or explain the use of the term "crime" in connection with decisions that set in motion the destruction of most life in the northern hemisphere.

At the same time, these decisions would almost surely be taken in good conscience, with no awareness of criminal intent or culpability in the minds of the perpetrators, who would include the most prestigious governmental elites. They would have in mind justifications of national security, of "supreme emergency," that would seem to them, at the time, totally to overshadow both legal and underlying moral considerations.

They would be mistaken in these beliefs, as would be evident to any survivors (say, in the southern hemisphere). Just how they could so delude themselves is one of the things that needs investigating, preferably before the event. What "real" motives could generate such a delusional system and trigger such murderous, suicidal and catastrophic responses in intelligent, successful men of affairs?

My purpose in investigating is not to condemn, convict or punish anyone for past or future crimes. It is to avert a new crime, to warn: potential victims, potential bystanders and facilitators, potential perpetrators.

\nuc\deterrence
January 30, 1994

The argument for nuclear deterrence is like the Roman: "If you want peace, prepare for war."

Is it true that preparation has, internationally, on balance and on the whole, lessened the frequency of wars? Would there have been fewer wars, with less general preparations?

Against the Roman slogan is Einstein's assertion: "You cannot simultaneously prevent war and prepare for war."

In an individual instance, Einstein is surely wrong: at least in the short run, being prepared for war can make attack on oneself less likely (see the experience of Sweden or Switzerland) (see even, the lack of war between the US and SU during the Cold War). But he probably meant, "you cannot prepare for war and eliminate war permanently, or act maximally or even moderately effectively to do so."

In part, this is because, as Dad said, to prepare for and to threaten acts of violence is to affirm the legitimacy and appropriateness, the entitlement, perhaps even the obligation, to carry out these acts under some circumstances. (Especially if the threat is not accompanied by the condemnation of such acts under all circumstances--in the form of the warning, "This response would never be justified, it would always be deeply wrong, but nevertheless it is, unfortunately, likely to occur in the face of certain provocations, as an unavoidable reflection of certain human or organizational or nationalistic tendencies of revenge or irrationality." This warning could hardly be taken as sincere if accompanied by actual, governmentally-sponsored acts of preparation for this "illicit" response).

But, as Dad pointed out, such an affirmation could be not only invalid, mistaken, but extremely dangerous, as a "teaching." And unless it could be argued persuasively that it was essential in order to avert an even greater danger--of a greater, imminent and otherwise nearly-certain evil--it would be not merely imprudent but sinful, evil, wicked, wrong. In other words, not only is it untrue--it would not be legitimate to carry out such an act (in particular, he was addressing, to risk or bring about nuclear winter) under any circumstances--but it is a dangerous untruth, an impermissible untruth, not a "necessary" untruth.